

COMPUTERWORLD

Warp Server beta impresses

Testers say it tops Microsoft offering

By Laura DiDio

A handful of the first beta users of OS/2 Warp Server say IBM's newest network operating system has many pluses, including easy installation, solid performance and a notable lack of bugs for a pre-release version.

During the past month, IBM released 12,000 beta copies of its OS/2 Warp Server network operating system. The product adds the best features of LAN Server 4.0 to OS/2 Warp, said Art Olbert, vice president of LAN Systems at IBM's Personal Software Products Division.

OS/2 Warp Server is an integrated file, print, application and database server that competes with Microsoft Corp.'s Windows NT Server 3.51. IBM's LAN Server had garnered about 14% market share in the first half of the year, according to International Data Corp. (IDC) in Framingham, Mass. IDC also found that the nearly 470,000 IBM OS/2 application server installations outnumber the 160,000 Windows NT Server sites by a 3-to-1 margin.

Far and away

Josh Airall, a systems analyst at Cincinnati Bell Information Systems, said he considers OS/2 Warp Server to be a year or two ahead of Windows NT Server in several areas. Those include object-oriented technology, real-time desktop management and dynamic domain named services.

The information systems arm of Cincinnati Bell, which comprises several thousand users at four U.S. sites, is deploying both the Warp Server beta and Windows NT Server.

Unlike NT, Warp Server interoperates seamlessly with other network operating system environments, such as Novell, Inc.'s NetWare and Banyan Systems, Inc.'s Vines, Airhall said. "OS/2 Warp Server today, with its real-time network management and dynamic domain named services, is equivalent to Microsoft's next generation of Windows NT, Cairo, which won't ship for a year," he added.

All the users with whom *Computerworld* spoke said they were surprised by the lack of bugs in the Warp Server beta.

"I expected many more problems, but so far I've only encountered a few minor bugs that are easily remedied," said Jason Jeremias,

LAN administrator at Deloitte & Touche in Anchorage, Alaska.

Other businesses cited Warp Server's conservative memory consumption as another area in which the forthcoming IBM network operating system has an advantage over the rival Microsoft platform.

"NT Server has proved much more of a resource hog than OS/2 Warp Server," said Abdul Nabi, systems administrator at University Bank and Trust in Palo Alto, Calif.

Nabi said Windows NT Server needs "at least 16M bytes to run smoothly and 24M bytes to achieve real speed on workstations and at least 32M bytes of server memory to support a small network." He claimed OS/2 Warp Server requires only 16M bytes of server memory and 8M bytes of workstation memory to achieve "the same level of performance as NT Server."

Still the one

Yet Nabi said he still considers Windows NT Server technically superior to OS/2 Warp Server in some key areas; NT offers better stability, security and crash protection and a more stable file system.

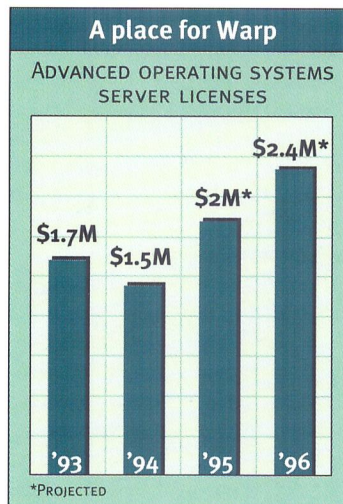
"It's a catch-22 because those features are what cause Windows NT Server to gobble resources," he said. "Overall, OS/2 Warp Server gives us more bang for the buck."

Bill Howey, a senior systems consultant at Avco Financial Services Corp. in Irvine, Calif.,

echoed those statements. He said he was pleased with the easy installation. "I clicked on Express install, answered seven questions, went off and had lunch and came back and the [network operating system] was properly configured," Howey said.

Amidst all the applause, however, users and analysts all pointed to one big "but" that could relegate Warp Server to niche-player status: IBM's lack of marketing muscle.

Tom Kucharvy, president of Summit Strategies, Inc. in Boston, said IBM can achieve mainstream success with OS/2 Warp Server if the company wins over its installed base in large corporate accounts.



Source: International Data Corp., Framingham, Mass.